

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 60 minutes, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority in control of the first half and the Republicans in control of the final half.

The Senator from New Mexico is recognized.

FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION ACT

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, yesterday I introduced legislation that has been given the number S. 2593, the Forest Landscape Restoration Act of 2008. I developed this legislation with Senators DOMENICI and FEINSTEIN, who are cosponsors of the bill. We also have as cosponsors Senators ALLARD, WYDEN, SALAZAR, CANTWELL, CRAIG, AKAKA, and CRAPO. I also am pleased to point out that Chairman GRIJALVA in the House of Representatives is introducing a companion bill, and I look forward to working with him as his subcommittee in the Natural Resources Committee moves forward with that bill.

This legislation establishes a program to select and fund projects that restore forests at a landscape scale through a process that encourages collaboration, relies on the best available science, facilitates local economic development, and leverages local funds with national and private funding.

As many of my colleagues know, we are facing serious forest health and wildfire challenges throughout our country. A century of over-aggressive fire suppression, logging, and other land uses have significantly deteriorated entire landscapes.

These conditions have played an important role in the extraordinary wildfires and insect-caused mortality that we have seen literally on millions of acres of national forest and other lands. To address these problems, it is critical that we begin trying to restore our forests on a landscape scale.

Landscape-scale restoration is key for controlling wildfire suppression costs. It is an important component of successful economic development. It is important for the health of many of our forest ecosystems.

Despite the importance of landscape-scale restoration, neither the National Fire Plan nor the Healthy Forest Restoration Act nor any of the other efforts we have made to date have been very successful in facilitating restoration and hazardous fuels reduction on

landscape scales. A lack of sufficient funding is one of the primary reasons. Restoring landscapes takes a significant amount of funding over a significant period of time.

To address that problem, the Forest Landscape Restoration Act authorizes \$40 million per year for 10 years to be paid into a national pool. Eligible landscape restoration projects from around the country would compete for a portion of that money. Mr. President, \$40 million is not nearly enough money to fund landscape-scale treatments in all of the forest landscapes that need restoration, but it is a realistic amount for us to pursue at this time, and it is enough to make landscape-scale restoration a reality.

Because of funding and other challenges, landscape-scale restoration remains largely theoretical. As a result, this legislation is designed to be both practical and experimental. It does not redirect existing efforts. Instead, it adds to existing efforts by creating a program that will make planning, funding, and carrying out at least a handful of these landscape-scale restoration projects possible.

Again, I thank Senators DOMENICI and FEINSTEIN and the other cosponsors of this legislation for working with me on this bill. I also thank the many stakeholders from across the spectrum for their input on the legislation, including the Nature Conservancy which has been very supportive of this effort.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The assistant majority leader.

ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank the majority leader, Senator REID, who was here earlier today talking about the economic stimulus package. What I have tried to do is to understand at this moment where the Republicans are, and it is hard to follow because initially there was agreement between the Republican and Democratic leaders in the House—Speaker PELOSI, Congressman BOEHNER, and Secretary Paulson of the Bush administration. They came up with the notion that to get the economy moving forward, we should send a rebate check of about \$600 for individuals and \$1,200 for families and additional money for children across the country, which is certainly an excellent starting point because the administration was persuaded to include the lower income families across America, and there were limits on family income as to eligibility.

The Senate Finance Committee took up this proposal from the House and suggested a few changes. I think each one of them is a positive change. For instance, they said: Let's include 21 million seniors receiving Social Security checks. If the idea is to put the money in the hands of people who will spend it, certainly our seniors on fixed incomes, many who struggle with utility bills, keeping their homes warm,

paying for gasoline, the cost of food and prescription drugs, they can use the money. An additional \$500 or \$600 will be spent by them. That was included in the Senate finance package. That was not in the original House version. I think that is a positive improvement.

Then they also said: If we are talking about groups of people who should be recognized, those disabled veterans from previous conflicts and certainly from Iraq and Afghanistan should be included as well. There is argument here. Those men and women certainly deserve special consideration for all they have given to America. So that was added to the House version of the bill on the part of the Senate Finance Committee.

Then they went to another category, and this is one the economists say is a very important category: people who are currently unemployed, those folks looking for jobs, many of whom are struggling to keep their families together while they find a job after they have been laid off from previous employment. If they receive additional money, economists say they are most likely to spend it in a hurry. So they encouraged us to include them in the relief we are providing with this tax rebate.

I have been listening carefully to see if our Republican colleagues believe these people deserve help as well. I am beginning to believe this is the real problem the Republicans have. They are concerned about giving additional money to people who are currently unemployed. Yesterday, one Senator from Texas on the Republican side said that just encourages them not to find work. I took a look at the amount of money that is paid to people on unemployment. It is hard to believe that is the kind of money that will lead to a life of leisure, where you decide: Heck, I don't need a job; I have unemployment benefits.

It turns out that unemployment benefits are not that generous—\$500 a week would be a big number, and for many it is a lot less. If we suggest people will stop working with that kind of income, I think it overlooks the obvious. Many people in lower income categories struggle from paycheck to paycheck. Losing a job creates a family emergency. What we are talking about is whether we should provide additional help to those unemployed. This has been done before. It is not a new concept. In fact, historically, if you want to fire up the economy and put spending power in the hands of people across America, helping the unemployed is one of the first places you turn.

The way the Finance Committee does it is to extend unemployment benefits, currently at 13 weeks, another 13 weeks, which will be another 3 months or so, except for States with the highest unemployment, and then they would be extended another 26 weeks